



Storm-Damaged Trees – Helping Trees Recover

A Guide for Oklahoma Landowners

It is part of life in Oklahoma: devastating storms damage forests and community trees across the state. Many lose branches and stems while others are toppled or completely blown away. Evergreens and hardwoods are all affected, from young stands to mature trees with large crowns. Storms kill many trees outright by uprooting them and completely stripping their bark, but many damaged trees can survive if given the right care. Don't make hasty decisions! There are things that can be done to help many damaged trees recover.

Practice Safety First!

Homeowners who work on their own trees should use extreme caution. Working with chainsaws or other tree care equipment and removing large trees or limbs is dangerous. Broken branches or leaning trees can be easily dislodged by the wind so wear safety gear. Do not climb a ladder with a chain saw. Do not climb into a heavily damaged tree and never touch any tree near electric wires. Assess your particular tree situation carefully and watch for safety hazards. Most tree work needs to be done by trained professionals, especially when the work requires climbing or the tree is leaning against another tree or structure, or where falling debris might put you or your property at risk.

Eliminate immediate hazards

Remove dead trees; trees leaning severely; trees with broken, twisted or cracked stems; trees with extensive broken roots; and any large dead or broken limbs that are still attached to the tree. Landowners with acreage should complete a damage assessment before salvaging any forest stands. Unfortunately, downed or damaged trees that could be salvaged will lose their value within a few months because of decay and discoloration. Marketing salvaged material will be more challenging because of the sheer volume of damaged trees in the region.

Hire an arborist

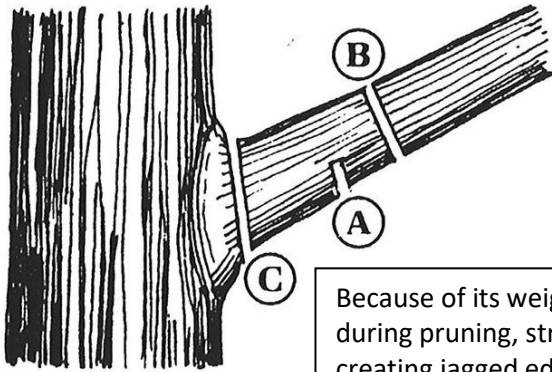
Hire a qualified arborist to get individual tree care work done properly and safely. Trained arborists are aware of proper pruning and removal procedures and can reduce the chance of further damage to the tree. Check to see that they are certified and ask for certificates of insurance, including proof of liability for personal and property damage and workman's compensation. Also request local references and get more than one estimate if possible.

Prevent additional damage

After the trees have begun to recover, you may want to do additional pruning to improve their appearance and further reduce hazards. If the top has been broken but the tree is otherwise salvageable, prune the top back to a strong lateral branch. Damaged branches should be pruned back to the branch collar using the "three-step method" shown below to minimize further injury. Topping or "de-horning" a tree generally leads to tree decline and increased maintenance needs, so avoid these destructive practices.



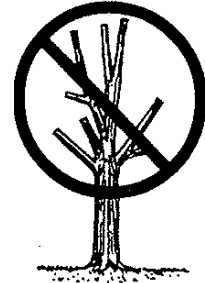
Steps in Proper Pruning



Because of its weight, a branch can tear loose during pruning, stripping the bark and creating jagged edges that invite insects and disease. That won't happen if you follow these steps.

- A. Make a partial cut from beneath, at a point several inches away from the trunk.
- B. Make a second cut from above, several inches out from the first cut, to allow the limb to fall safely.
- C. Complete the job with a final cut just outside the branch collar, the raised area that surrounds the branch where it joins the trunk.

**Never “de-horn”
or top a tree!**



Never cut the main branches of a tree back to stubs. Ugly, weakly-attached limbs will often grow back higher than the original branches and be more likely to break off in a future storm.

Some tree damage may not be immediately apparent. Hidden cracks may cause branches to droop when leaves come out in the spring. Stem decay or cracks may lead to structural loss, causing the tree or large branches to become hazardous. Avoid climbing severely damaged trees. Root damage may not be evident until twigs or branches in the upper crown begin dying after two or three growing seasons. Stressed, dying and dead trees attract insect pests, such as borers and bark beetles. Remove insect-infested trees to reduce risk to healthy trees nearby.

Don't panic!
Stop, think and be patient!
Practice safety first.
Get professional advice.

*Acknowledgments: Forestry Services appreciates the use of the format and much of the text prepared by the USDA Forest Service in Durham, New Hampshire, following their 1998 ice storm.
Artwork courtesy of the National Arbor Day Foundation.*